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Bottled water market mushrooms in Afghanistan

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Soldiers, foreign government officials and aid workers in Afghanistan drink bottled water rather than tap water, resulting in a business worth an estimated \$100 million.

Several Afghan companies are exploiting the opportunity, including **Afghan Beverage Industries (ABI)**, an Afghan-owned company that opened a bottling plant in Kabul in 2006. The company produces a water brand called Cristal.

"The expat community drink bottled water in huge volumes, and more affluent local Afghans will start leaning towards bottled water because of the status it reflects," explained ABI Operations Director Cecil Galloway.

At first, foreign suppliers, mostly from neighbouring Pakistan and the UAE, dominated the market, but in 2007 the Afghan Government imposed a hefty 40% tariff on bottled water importers in an effort to encourage domestic producers.

Development agencies believe nurturing local industry is crucial to breaking the country's dependency on foreign aid. An NGO based in Ottawa, **Peace Dividend Trust**, has launched a project that encourages international agencies and companies to 'buy Afghan first'.

By linking international buyers with Afghan companies, the organisation has facilitated about \$46 million with domestic businesses since September 2006.

The strategy has had some success in the bottled water industry. Last year, ABI became the first Afghan company to win a contract to supply bottled water with the US military. At the company's \$26 million plant on the outskirts of Kabul, ABI can manufacture 13,000 50cl bottles per hour. In addition to about 15 foreign workers, the company employs about 170 locals.

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